



[DNR Home](#)

[Outdoor Activities](#)

[What's Going On?](#)

[Resource Management](#)

[Access DNR](#)

[Inside DNR](#)

Habichat Wild Acres Program



[Native Plant Profile: Common Hackberry](#)

[Maryland Wildlife: Opossum](#)

[Pruning Trees in Late Winter](#)

[Coffee & Orioles](#)

[Printer-Friendly Version](#)

[.PDF File - Opens with Acrobat Reader](#)

[Habichat Reader's Survey](#)

HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space **-IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property. Complete the online [Habichat Reader's Survey](#).

Write to Me! Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941

E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

Native Plant Profile.....Common Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*)



Hackberry is a hardy slow growing tree. It can grow to 14 feet in 10 years, possible to reach 40-50 feet at maturity. Is capable of living 150-200 years. Occurs on a variety of sites, moist to dry, but best growth is in alkaline soils. Found growing in open places or mixed hardwood forests as an occasional rather than abundant species. Fruit persists into winter, which makes it valuable as a food source for winter wildlife. The tree is used frequently for nesting by many birds.

Flowers/fruits: Green flowers April to May. Dark red to purple drupes ripen from September to November and are relished by wildlife. Drupes are sweet, edible; hence the other name for Hackberry is Sugarberry Tree.



Landscape Notes: Member of the elm family, with the arching similar to the American Elm. Hackberries do not reach the heights of the elms so are more suitable for a small location. Lowest branches occur high on trunk, desirable among street trees. Can be planted as specimens or in rows for windbreaks or hedgerows.

Landscape Concerns: Subject to disease called witches –broom, which causes abnormal growth on twigs of branches that resemble brooms. Disease does not affect its wildlife value.

Hackberries are food for: Turkey, Bobwhite Quail, Pheasant, Common Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Crow, Tufted Titmice, Mockingbird, Catbird, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Cardinal, Rufous Sided Towhee, Fox Sparrow, Evening Grosbeak, Eastern Phoebe, Raccoon, Gray and Flying Squirrels

Hackberry leaves are food for caterpillars of the Question Mark, Comma, Hackberry, Tawny Emperor, Snout and Mourning Cloak butterflies.



Additional Notes: Hackberries provide food for a wide variety of wildlife, including some spectacular butterflies that are not easily attracted to a butterfly nectar garden.

Maryland Wildlife: Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)

The Native Americans name for "opossum" means animal that is white in color. The opossum does look more like a white rat than a relative of the other marsupials, kangaroos and koala bears. It is the only native marsupial found in Maryland.



Photographer: Alden M. Johnson, California Academy of Sciences, CalAcademy Collection. Copyright © 1999 California Academy of Sciences.
Click on photo above for larger view.

Size: 24"- 40". Weight: 4- 15 lbs.

Physical appearance: This mammal has 50 teeth and five toes on each foot. One toe is opposable and can grasp like a thumb. Opossums are excellent climbers that can grasp branches with its tail.

Food: It is an omnivore. Insects, snakes, toads, frogs worms, young small mammals, bird eggs, young birds, grapes, pokeberries, blackberries, mushrooms, and nuts are part of its varied diet. Opossums love persimmons when in season and the same is true for apples and corn. This mammal also eats garbage and carrion, especially road kill. Weak hearing and poor eyesight are reasons cars hit many as they go in search for food.

Habitat: Suburbs, edges of towns, cities, farms, woodlots and forests

Home range: Mainly solitary and nomadic, the average minimum range is 11.5 acres, but can vary depending on food supplies.

Den: Will seek shelter in hollow logs, groundhog burrows rock piles, tree cavities, abandoned squirrel leaf nest, under porches, old buildings and barns. Opossums will change dens frequently.

Lifespan: 1-5 years in the wild.

Natural History: Mates late February to March. Gestation is 12-13 days. Litters consist of 5-13 young. The young are about ½ inch long and are born undeveloped. Crawl to mother's pouch on belly to complete development as all marsupials do. Young find nipple and begin nursing. The teat swells in mouth to help keep young inside. Female can close pouch to keep young inside. The young let go of the teat at 8-9 weeks and begin to search for their own food at 3 to 4 months. Will stop nursing but will stay with the mother for a few more weeks. Female opossums can breed again mid- May to July. Opossums do not hibernate but den during bad winter weather. They can experience frostbite, so it is not unusual to see opossums with ears, toes and tips or tails missing or damaged from extreme cold. Opossums are nocturnal. Some opossums will feign death to avoid attacks from predators, since many predators will not eat dead food. Typically the opossum lies on its side with eyes and mouth open and tongue sticking out. This "Playing possum" can last up to several hours or only a few minutes. Many opossums will bluff a predator by hissing and showing off its 50 teeth.



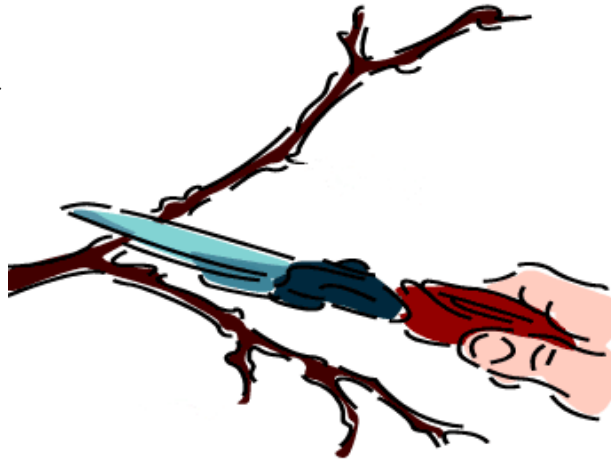
Status in Maryland: Abundant throughout Maryland.

Additional Notes: Opossums are the most abundant in Central and South America. Many folk tales in the U.S. involve stories about opossums.

Pruning Trees & Shrubs in Late Winter

Trees and shrubs will be healthier after a good pruning. Pruning enables a plant to produce more leaves, nuts, fruits, or flowers, which will provide wildlife with more food and shelter. Shrubs and trees that produce berries fair better if they are pruned during their dormant time. This is late winter or early spring. Diseases which affect trees and shrubs are less active during the colder months of late winter.

A good rule to remember is it is best to prune a tree or a shrub when it is neither flowering nor producing fruits. Pruning in the later winter can also help you create branch interest in the design of your wildacres. Trees and shrubs have a natural shape that they could grow into if they have perfect conditions of light and water. However, perfect conditions are rarely found and shrubs and trees grow leggy and unbalanced in response to lack of light, or too much moisture. Thinning, (pruning) helps bring these plants back to their natural shape instead of always doing the traditional hedging of the plant. Even topiary, pruning plants into formal shapes, can be used to recreate the shape of a shrub that you saw in its natural shape in the wild.



Ice storms can damage long, leggy branches. Pruning produces stronger stockier stems and branches that can tolerate ice damage. Prune summer – flowering shrubs, which flower on new wood in late winter and early spring.

For the details on what to prune and how to prune check out our fact sheet- www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/waprune.asp, an additional bonus for wildlife is, you can take the twigs and branches from your pruning and build bush piles for additional shelter for wildlife in late winter www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wabrush.asp If you would like more information on tree and shrub pruning. Contact the Maryland Forest Service, www.dnr.state.md.us/forests/ the Home and Garden Information center of the Maryland Cooperative Extension, University of Maryland, www.agnr.umd.edu/users/hgic

Coffee & Orioles



Wintertime is often a time when many escape to the tropics to enjoy sun and palm trees. For Baltimore Orioles, winter paradise is a coffee plantation,



shade and Inga trees. Every year, Baltimore Orioles and over 200 other migratory birds leave their summer habitats in North America and travel to Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean Islands. As in North America, habitat loss in the tropics has paradise hard to come by. The answer may lie in your cup of coffee.

Coffee is the developing world's second most valuable export. Two thirds of the world's coffee is produced in Central America and the Caribbean. It is grown in the world's tropical rainforest regions on hillsides at 1500 to 4500 feet above sea level. Coffee can be grown large scale in harmony with native forest. Up into the mid 1970's most coffee was grown on coffee plantations in the under story of wild figs, mangos, citrus fruits, and nuts.

Studies in the tropics suggest that coffee traditionally grown in the shade of the tropic rainforest trees provides habitat for numerous migratory birds and other wildlife. The Smithsonian Migratory Bird center found that shaded coffee plantations can support 150 bird species and is especially important habitat for wintering Baltimore Orioles. The structural diversity offered by these plantations and their rainforest canopy also provides habitat for reptiles, small mammals and other wildlife. Coffee agro ecosystems do work.



Of all the agricultural transformations that have taken place in the tropics, shade coffee has been the least harmful to birds. Encouraging farmers to grow shade coffee can have an immense impact on habitat for all wildlife, not just migratory birds such as Orioles.

So what can you do to help the Orioles and still enjoy that cup of coffee?

1. Buy shade-grown coffee for your home use.
2. Ask your retailer to carry it.
3. Convert the office to brewing only shade-grown coffee.
4. Educate friends and co-workers. Give gifts that include shade-grown coffee.
5. Learn more about the issue from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center:
<http://natzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/MigratoryBirds/Coffee>

If you enjoyed this issue of Habichat, you might want to check out our online back issues and clickable listing of Habichat articles.

<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp#habichat>

Acknowledgements:

- Botanical illustration of Common Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. Illustrated flora of the northern states and Canada. Vol. 1: 629.
- Photograph of Common Hackberry, courtesy of USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Herman, D.E. et al. 1996. North Dakota tree handbook. USDA NRCS ND State Soil Conservation Committee; NDSU Extension and Western Area Power Admin.,

Bismarck, ND.

- Photo collage of Common Hackberry tree, bark & foliage courtesy of Conservation Trees and Shrubs, Pocket ID Guide, United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Photograph of Opossum family in tree, courtesy of photographer Alden M. Johnson, California Academy of Sciences, CalAcademy Collection. Copyright © 1999 California Academy of Sciences.
- Photograph of single Opossum on log, courtesy of Bob Gress, Illinois Trapping and Furbearer Image Library.
- Photograph of Shade-grown coffee, courtesy of Courtesy of USFWS, Photo by Francisco Osuna, Elan Organic Coffees.
- Photograph of coffee tree Courtesy of USFWS, Photo by Francisco Osuna, Elan Organic Coffees.
- Illustration of Baltimore Oriole, courtesy of Wade Henry.

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm. Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Bioimages, a project of Vanderbilt University, provides educational information to the public on biologically related topics, as well as a source of biological images for personal and non-commercial use. <http://bioimages.cas.vanderbilt.edu/>

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

In an effort to continue to provide quality backyard habitat information we are asking our readers to tell us what you think. Please take a few minutes to answer our survey. This will help us to improve our site so we can continue to deliver the information you want.

[Habichat Reader's Survey](#)

For Additional Information, Contact:

Wild Acres Program
Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service
Attn: Marilyn Mause
Gwynnbrook WMA
3740 Gwynnbrook Ave
Owings Mills MD 21117
410-356-0941

E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

Habichat, the newsletter for Wild Acres participants, is published by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Editor: Marilyn Mause

Wild Acres

Habitat for Wildlife

Wildlife & Heritage
Home

Contact Us



Access For All

[Click here for online back issues.](#)

The facilities and services of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources are available to all without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, physical or mental disability. This document is available in alternative format upon request from a qualified individual with a disability.

[Email us](#) with questions, comments, and suggestions.
© Copyright 1995-2006 Maryland Department of Natural Resources